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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the rationale for using sustained content-based instruction (CBI) to teach English for academic purposes to non- native speakers, drawing on recent research and theory and on both personal experience and a small-scale study of college students. Discussion begins with a look at college and graduate students' needs for both language skills and skills in argumentation, particularly in the conventions of Anglo-American rhetoric. Topics addressed here include cultural, political, and psycho-social questions about English language hegemony and the question of who should learn these rhetorical conventions. Literature on sustained CBI is then reviewed, offering support for it from experience with student frustration, research on its effectiveness, and interviews with students who had studied English in sustained CBI classes. In the interviews, students noted benefits in content-area expertise and learning motivation. Several sustained CBI courses developed by the author are described briefly, with course outlines appended. Contains 30 references. (MSE)

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Sustained Content-Based Teaching for Academic Skills Development in ESL/EFL

Marcia Pally, Ed.D.

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Definition: sustained content-based instruction (CBI). Classes in which students practice English language skills in the process of studying one subject area over time, often for a semester, just as students in content classes do. These skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammatical forms, and any sub-skills needed to do these, such as note-taking, research etc. This content may center on one text or it may rely on many texts (book chapter, periodical literature, Internet sources etc.) each one illuminating one aspect of a central subject.

Key to sustained CBI is the idea that students learn skills because they need them for the immediate, pressing job of grasping the content. Language teachers provide a "scaffold"--to borrow from Vygotsky--to help them do so.

Though content-based instruction has been used extensively in language

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classes, "sustained" content-based classes are relatively new in that they are not language classes linked to "sister" content classes, but rather language classes themselves which simulate a college class and also provide explicit instruction in language and academic skills.

Intro

I became interested in content-based language teaching when I had the strange experience of not understanding essays written in English, my native language. These essays were written by NNS graduate students who had high TOEFL scores, whose English language skills were advanced enough to gain them entrance into a prestigious urban university, and who were expected to perform alongside native speakers in their graduate programs. And yet I could not follow their work. These student-writers were not lacking in vocabulary or sentence-level accuracy for the most part, nor did they fail to use appropriate cohering devices. In fact, they sometimes overused them. But something did not "track."

Student Needs: The skills of argumentation

That "something" turned out to be the way argumentation is made in English. I mean "argumentation" in the broadest sense, "a coherent series of statements leading from a premise to a conclusion" and "the act or process of forming reasons and drawing conclusions, and applying them to a case in discussion" (Webster's,

1989). Argumentation is involved in the range of academic/professional tasks, from lecture comprehension to research, and to all genres of written and oral presentation. Understanding it and being able to make it are among the fundamental needs of all students and professionals in an English-language setting.

Argumentation in English requires that students be able to: 1) grasp the claims or perspectives of what they read and hear; 2) understand the methods of proof and evidence used to support those claims/perspectives; 3) question or challenge both claims and support; 4)synthesize claims and support from a range of courses; and 5)present their own positions or perspectives using appropriate academic/professional rhetorical conventions.

Yet, argumentation and rhetorical conventions vary among languages, (sub)cultures, and discourse communities. The study of contrastive rhetoric and genre analysis finds that many cultures do not use the so-called "linear" analysis that I just described, with its distinctions between theses and their proofs and, as Fox notes, with "directness, to precise relationships between verbs and their subjects, to clear and relatively obvious transitions, to announcement of intent and summary statements" (Fox, 1994, p. 20, see also Fox, 1996). Rather, they rely on indirection, elaboration of rhetorical flourishes, received wisdom, contextualization of issues (in contrast to under-the-microscope analysis) and collectivist notions fo evidence. As a

result, there was a gap between the strategies my students were using and the strategies common in English. As Ann Johns writes, "because some of our students do not share academic genre knowledge with their instructors, or with other readers and writers, they face considerable obstacles. It is these obstacles that we [ESL teachers] should attempt to face" (Johns, 1997, p. 37).

Listening to my students' oral presentations, I found much the same. The exposition of claim-and-support was diffuse. The use of emphasis, tone, register, pragmatic strategies such as time and conversation management, and other devices that roughly parallel the cohering and cohesive tactics of writing nevertheless did not make their presentations cohere.

In sum, it was difficult for me--and the content-class teachers of these students--to grasp the student's ideas, and so it was difficult to appreciate them. Their academic/professional progress was hobbled because, simply put, it was difficult to see how smart they were. If graduate students already accepted into degree programs were writing and speaking at odds with English language norms, how were younger students or those still in ESL programs communicating? Perhaps not as well as they could be.

Two Notes on Anglo-American Argumentation: Hegemony and Student Populations:

Before going on, I'd like to make two points: one about teaching the conventions of Anglo-American argumentation and second about who should learn them. Teaching Anglo-American conventions of argument raises cultural, political, and psycho-social questions about English-language hegemony worldwide and its gatekeeper role in the advancement of ESL/EFL students (Al-Abed Al-Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Benesch, 1993a, 1993b; Freire, 1974; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Hornberger & Ricento, 1996; Tollefson, 1991). The students whose papers I read had many important insights and ways to express them--why should they have to learn my Anglo-American ways? And what knowledge are we losing by limiting ourselves to those conventions? Yet at least at present, ESL/EFL students who communicate with the "mainstream" English-speaking world--to succeed in or challenge it--benefit from knowing this kind of argumentation. It is, so to speak, an arrow worth having in one's quiver. So I'd like to continue on the idea that at present, for students who want or need to learn mainstream English argumentation, it is worth teaching well. Learning it well may even raise students' awareness of the culture-bound nature of expression.

To the second point: Who should learn it? So far, I have been stressing the needs of students in or bound for college/professional training. But, as Lisa Delpit points out, knowing these conventions of argument is also useful to all students who

want to understand the factors that affect their lives--from student loans to health insurance--especially to students who did not learn Western protocols of power at home. Delpit writes, "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (Delpit, 1991, p. 486),and "to act as if power doesn't exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same" (p. 496).

There is much more to be said on both these issues, but given the time I'd like to get back to issues raised specifically by sustained CBI.

Rationale for Sustained CBI

After the experiences with these students, I began looking at the literature where I found echoes of my experiences with them. Leki & Carson for example (1994, 1997), found that ESL classes often asked for personal reaction papers but did not often require "text responsible" writing where students are responsible for demonstrating that they have learned an area of content–a skill basic in all academic/professional work. Research by Chitrapu (1996), Kasper (1995/1996; 1997 and Smoke (1998) showed a gap between the skills taught in ESL programs and those needed by students in academic/professional settings. It seemed that if language emanates from context–as Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Krashen, research on schema, and communicative language theorists all have claimed -- then we were not

providing the context for full development of this sort of English.

Students, like most people, learn something when they have to. When something must get done, they learn what they need to do it. The question was, what context or situation could be created in the classroom in which students would "have to" do various academic/professional jobs and so learn the skills necessary to do them.

I began thinking about how NS students learn these academic skills. When they get good academic preparation, they learn those skills through taking content classes. [And when they don't get good preparation, they often end up in remedial classes, sometimes along with ESL students.] It is in their content classes that, in order to learn the content -to acquire content area expertise -- students develop academic skills. They gather information from print, oral, and electronic sources; draw out the central points of that information; discuss, synthesize and question that information; become familiar with the argumentations and rhetorical conventions of a discipline; and write over a period of time long enough so that both ideas and prose may be revised. Later, they apply those skills to other, new content areas.

And so I thought, if NS learn academic skills through content classes --in other words, through sustained study of a subject area-- ESL/EFL students may benefit from a similar approach. Moreover, since college and professional programs

expect students to have these skills. ESL/EFL students may benefit from practicing them before they must perform commensurately with NS peers. In their 1996 survey of the requirements of 900 university classes, Ferris and Tagg found--perhaps not surprisingly-- that ESL students benefitted from learning in their ESL classes the skills specific to mainstream ones. Without sustained study there is little information for students to accrue, compare, contrast, question or synthesize into support for claims of their own.

In other words, simulating a college/professional class--with all its reading, writing and speaking requirements -- is at least one context in which students can learn the skills needed in college/professional settings. This is what we call sustained CBI.

As in other academic/professional classes, students might be passionately or mildly interested in the subject of a course; others might be taking the class only because they have to. If course content is a subject generally familiar to educated people, the information itself will be useful. But whatever the subject, students who learn it will also learn academic skills in the process. And these skills will help students grapple with future academic/professional demands. These skills are what Widdowson and John Flowerdew have called "transferable" language knowledge--the ways information is organized and the ways argument is made in

English that undergirds the discipline-specific genre conventions which students may later learn in content classes. Importantly, language teachers can help students acquire these skills before they must improvise on their own in content classes.

Support for Sustained CBI: Student Frustrations

In any case, such was my hypothesis after pondering the essays I could not understand. But more than my own guesses, it was the frustrations of the students themselves that pointed me towards sustained CBI. They complained they had never been asked to do--or been helped to do--what their university classes now demanded of them. Though most had read ESL/EFL textbooks and newspaper articles, they had been asked only to answer general "reading comprehension" questions but not to extract the line of argumentation. Most had been asked to prepare personal reaction papers or oral presentations, but none had been required to produce "text responsible" work, master the content, its vocabulary, forms, registers, methods of proof. None had followed a subject long enough to synthesize information, question data or present written or oral argumentation of their own.

Support for Sustained CBI: The literature

Support for sustained CBI comes from several areas of second language acquisition research. A few brief examples: Merrill Swain began advocating "pushed output" in the mid-19080s--that is, oral and written presentation that is just

a bit closer to authentic academic work than students are used to producing. Cummins (1981) notes that language learners cannot acquire from non-academic language use what he calls cognitive academic learning proficiency (CALPs). Academic skills must be practiced in students' second language. In sum, if students want to develop academic skills, then they must be given real academic tasks on which to practice them. Leki and Carson (1997) recommend that ESL/EFL curricula avoid "the grab bag of supposedly high-interest readings with attendant assignments pulled from different topics every week or two" and that they focus instead on "in-depth treatments of subject matter" (p. 64). From their experience developing EFL classes, Fredrickson, Hagedorn and Reed (1991) suggest a paradigm for what this "in-depth treatment" might be: 1) students study one subject through the term, 2) the language and content increases in sophistication such that comprehension of later material depends on a grasp of earlier material; 3) students become familiar with the vocabulary and rhetorical devices of the discipline; and 4) students are encouraged to develop theory by assessing how well existing theories account for data. Similarly, Kutz, Groden and Zamel suggest, "a coherent framework of knowledge, focusing on a particular topic" (Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993, p. 85) to help students develop a "voice" in their writing. Both text analysis research (Bardovi-Harlig, 1990; Connor, 1994; Connor & Farmer, 1990; Schneider & Connor, 1991)

and genre studies suggest that students practice in their ESL classes the conventions of argumentation that they will need in other academic/professional settings–both to use those conventions and understand the socio-political structures they represent (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Gosden, 1992; Hammond, Wickert, Burns, Joyce & Miller, 1992; Strong & Candlin, 1993). It is the Australian genre researchers who have stressed studying rhetorical conventions to understand their biases and socio-political uses.

In her 1997 studies of ESL college students, Kasper found that students who had been in sustained content courses had higher pass rates into mainstream English and higher graduation records.

Support for Sustained CBI: Student Interviews

Finally, I'd like to read some interview material with students who studied in sustained CBI classes. In 1997, I conducted a series of open-ended and directed interviews with such students. One of their key points was the importance of gaining content-area expertise. This expertise gave them more information for developing their ideas (in discussion and writing), familiarity with rhetorical conventions, and more confidence in their grasp of both information and forms. Carina: "If you read about something different every week or few weeks, you just have to force yourself to find something to write. . . I need to read more, more back information." The

directed interviews echoed these comments. Yoshio: "In the other class we just read and react: what do I think? But in this class we have to analyze the author's opinion and we feedback the analyzing to our writing... I didn't like analyzing other writing but if we cannot analyze other writing, we cannot organize our writing."

Students also remarked on content area expertise in their comments on two of the most persistently difficult challenges facing ESL/EFL students: exemplification and questioning material written by "authoritative experts." Carina: "If you know more, you can write more and you are not writing the same thing all over... It's hard to be tough and say something if you can't support it."

A secondary benefit of sustained CBI was motivation. Pierre: "It's much more interesting to learn one thing... instead of trying to study everything and in fact study nothing... You read a lot of stuff, a lot of general opinion, but in the end you have nothing... In most cases, as a student, my brain would go away because my attention would be caught by something else. But in this course, we have to be very careful, to keep concentrating on what we study. This is very helpful, really. It's much more interesting to learn really one thing." Soo added: "Students are not children so they want some useful knowledge, not just English. English and good text, specific idea... So we--the students--talked about this class. It's very useful because we can study writing, we can study listening..., we can study reading and also speaking--

four--everything. One package."

These interviews suggest that expertise cannot be faked. Students know when they have read enough about a subject to compare material, synthesize it, challenge it, and use it as a basis for ideas of their own.

Conclusion:

Indeed, if we as ESL/EFL teachers do not provide sustained content and yet ask our students for academic performance, we are asking them to do something without the tools to do it. We force them to rely on personal experience and opinion, and while these are important, they are not sufficient. Formulating educated ideas, backing them up, and well-placed skepticism stem from extensive, precise reading and writing on a topic.

Absent adequate practice in these skills, students lack a full "scaffold" (Vygotsky, 1962) to academic study and the workplace, to advance up its ladders or to challenge them. Those who have friends or family that can help with these skills (or who can pay for assistance), will learn them. Students who don't have as much help--who often "are not already a participant in the culture of power" -- as Delpit says (1991, p. 486)--may find it harder to learn them or gain the leg-up into and over the "power" cultures that these skills introduce.

Challenges for the Sustained CBI Teacher:

Sustained CBI raises some questions for ESL/EFL teachers, notably: choosing a subject that will provide academic rigor but also interest students with varied backgrounds and goals; determining the appropriate level of discipline-specific language and forms so that the content remains academically demanding but so that much of the language, forms and skills will be useful in other settings; and lastly gaining enough expertise in the content area to teach it.

The rest of the panel will address these issues. I would just like to mention a little bit of what I've done. The sustained CBI courses that I've developed include: 1) Society & Cinema–about the assumptions and irritations of society that are reflected in film; 2) Language Acquisition, about how adults learn a second language, with an emphasis on contrastive rhetoric; 3) Aspects of Psychology; and 4) a course called The American Mind, about the underlying strains of American culture, such as the contradiction between individualism and strong adherence to group identities, or the historical need for immigration and suspicion of it. Each course requires analysis and synthesis of readings from books and periodicals, discussion, oral presentation and academic paper writing. I have taught each at the intermediate through the advanced level, the lower levels reading much of the same material, but more slowly and with more instructional support.

As an example of the skills taught and the integration of skills into course

content. I've provided a copy of the Table of Contents for materials from the Aspects of Psychology and Society & Cinema courses.

Dr. Marcia Pally

CINEMA & SOCIETY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Teacher

Ch.1 Start Trek: An Introduction to Film Criticism

Ch.2 "A Mirror to Nature"

Ch.3 Author! Author!: Narrative and Script

Ch.4 A Star is Born: Character and Performance

TABLE OF CONTENTS: CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Chapter	Critical Thinking Skills
Ch.1:	find the central idea(s) of a paragraph identify transition sentences find intro, middle & conclusion of a text definition of main idea identify main idea of a text brainstorming write a main idea for your paper find the central idea(s) of each paragraph in your writing
Ch.2	find the main points of the middle of a text develop a preliminary outline of a text find the main idea, intro, middle and conclusion of your paper find the main points of the middle in your paper develop a preliminary outline of your paper
Ch.3	find the main & supporting points of a text find the evidence (examples, quotes, data) develop an outline of a text develop an outline of your writing
Ch.4	implied points in a text how to use an outline (Ch.3) as a basis for summary writing develop an outline and summary of a text develop an outline and summary of your and/or a classmate's writing

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Cinema & Society

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS: CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Ch.5 Wait Until Dark: Camera and Light

Ch.5 how to question or disagree with a text
develop a question-outline (Q-outline)

develop a Q-outline for your own writing

Ch.6 Play It Again Sam: Dialogue & Soundtrack

Ch.6 practice with the Q-outline: "refute opposing opinion" strategies

use "refute opposing opinion" strategies in your writing

develop a Q-outline for a partner's writing
revise your paper using your partner's Q-outline as a guide

Ch.7 Dressed to Kill: Sets and Costumes

Ch.7 more practice with: Q-outlines, refute opposing opinion, and revision

Ch.8 The Last Picture Show Putting It Together

Ch.8 organizing a complete paper
introductions,
conclusions,
transitions
expanding your main idea
support for expanded main idea
draft writing

Appendices:

Glossary of Film Terms

Suggested Supplemental Films

Supplemental Readings on American Culture

Key to Chapter Outlines

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Aspects of Psychology

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content:	**Academic Skills:**
Preface:	* how the book is organized and how to use it
Chapter 1: Consciousness	**reading:** * find the main idea of each paragraph * find and chart key terms * developing private dictionaries * find and chart rhetorical conventions (strategies of definition, comparison, contrast, exemplification, etc) * find the main idea of an article or chapter * identify kinds of main ideas (describe, persuade, etc.) **writing:** * answering definition questions * answering reading comprehension questions * brainstorming * writing a main idea for your paper * writing assignments for papers or essay exams --introduction to types of papers
Chapter 2: Thought and Language	**reading:** * find the introduction, middle and conclusion of a reading * find main & supporting points of the "middle" of a reading * find evidence of the "middle" (examples, data, etc.) * find and chart transition sentences * develop an outline of a reading --outlines, note-taking, and research **writing:** * answering short answer questions (exam taking) * developing an outline for your paper/essay * writing assignments (for papers or essay exam writing) --definition essay: brainstorm, main idea, and outline (claim and support) – explanation essay: brainstorm, main idea, and outline (claim and support)

Chapter 3: Motivation and Emotion

reading:

* variations on the classic outline:
  --different sequences for main points, supporting points and evidence (inductive, deductive, etc.)
  --implied points

writing:

* answering application questions (exam taking)
* summary writing: using your outline to write a summary
* paraphrasing
* writing assignments
  -- summary writing and paraphrasing
  -- argument essay: brainstorm, main idea, and outline (claim and support)
  – persuasive essay: brainstorm, main idea, outline
* citations and bibliographies

Chapter 4: Human Development

reading:

* note when readings/sources disagree
* identify rhetorical conventions that show disagreement
* note when you disagree with a reading
* challenging/questioning a reading (the question-outline)

writing:

* practice definition, short answer and application questions
* writing assignments (papers and essay exams)
  --the compare/contrast essay: brainstorm, main idea, and outline (claim and support)
  --synthesizing texts and summarizing contrasting texts

Chapter 5: Personality

reading:

* questioning readings & "refute opposing opinion" strategies

writing:

* practice definition, short answer and application questions
* writing assignments (papers and essay exams)
  -- "refute opposing opinion" strategies: brainstorm, main idea and outline (claim & support)
* peer editing and revision
  --using the question-outline with a partner's paper

Chapter 6: Social Psychology

Consolidation of Skills:

Reading:

* key terms
* outlining, note-taking
* questioning/challenging readings

Writing:

Exam Questions:

* definition
* short answer
* application

Assignments for research papers or essay exams:

* brainstorm
* main idea
* outline (claim & support)
* summary/paraphrasing
* synthesizing readings
* compare/contrast strategies
* refute opposing opinion strategie
* peer editing and revision

Glossary

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